

someone reaching back for me by QueenWithABeeThrone

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Summary:

The kid looks back at them now. He's certainly not Will, though there are some superficial similarities: the color of his eyes, for example.

Jane crouches down in front of him, and says, "What's your name?"

The kid pauses. Then he tugs up his dirty sleeve, exposing a number tattooed on his wrist: 011. Then he points at himself.

or: three kids go looking for a lost boy in the woods. they find one, but he's not the one they're looking for. (familiar story, right? except he's really a boy.)

someone reaching back for me

Author's Note:

title from Bonnie Tyler's "Holding Out for a Hero".

background notes: Terry Ives did not get psychic powers in this AU and didn't volunteer for MK-ULTRA. instead she met Jim Hopper and they had a wild, passionate night that somehow ended up with a kid named Jane. (Sarah, by the way, is Jane's younger half-sister.)

Karen Wheeler did, however, and thus her son was taken from her when he was young. things went down and she was institutionalized, her husband remarried, and her kid Nancy didn't go in for that. Nancy, by the way, thinks her younger brother Mike died in the womb.

“Shit,” says Dustin, once all four of them have crammed themselves into his storm cellar. “Shit, shit, *shit*.”

“Say that a little louder, why don’t you?” hisses Lucas.

“Be quiet,” Jane mutters, because it’s been a long day and her friends arguing is not something she’s up for dealing with, right now. It wouldn’t go over too well with the kid, anyway.

Said kid—a boy their age with a shaved head and dirty clothes—is currently sitting in a hastily-improvised blanket fort, fiddling around with a walkie-talkie Jane filched from her dad’s room. He’s not very talkative, and she gets the feeling he doesn’t know many words.

Weird kid.

“We need to tell your mom,” says Lucas, to Dustin. “And we need to tell your dad too, Jane. Maybe he knows something.”

“Dad’s busy looking for Will,” says Jane. “And he’s not gonna find him, ‘cause Will’s good at hiding.”

“Yeah, but cops are good at finding,” Lucas says.

“They haven’t found Will,” Jane shoots back.

“Anyway, we can’t tell them,” says Dustin. “If we tell my mom or Jane’s dad about him,” and he waves his hand towards the kid, “they’re gonna know we snuck out to find Will. And they’re going to make sure we can’t do it again.”

“So we can’t tell them about—” Jane starts, then pauses. She looks at the kid, who’s looking around the storm cellar in fascination.

A while back, the party had redecorated the storm cellar so it could serve as their base, mostly because Dustin had claimed to feel incredibly depressed every time they played a campaign inside. Jane had tacked up a board keeping track of the campaign’s progress, and Lucas had moved a lot of toys and board games from his house into their new base.

And Will had brought pictures, and drawings, and tacked them up all over the walls. When they had finished, he’d deemed it almost as good as his own fort out in the woods.

The kid looks back at them now. He’s certainly not Will, though there are some superficial similarities: the color of his eyes, for example.

Jane crouches down in front of him, and says, “What’s your name?”

The kid pauses. Then he tugs up his dirty sleeve, exposing a number tattooed on his wrist: 011. Then he points at himself.

“Your name’s Eleven?” says Dustin. “Are you a clone or something?”

The kid’s brow furrows.

“This is ridiculous,” says Lucas.

“Okay, Eleven,” says Jane, testing the word out. It’s a crappy name. “I’m Jane. Jane Hopper.”

The kid nods.

"First," says Jane, "we need to get you some clothes." She pauses, "And second—how do you feel about Lev?"

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It's not that Jane *wants* to go against what her father says, is the thing.

Jim Hopper's a good dad, and not a bad cop, either. She loves him, and most of the time they tend to agree on things. It's just that they don't agree all the time, and this mess, with Will?

This is one of those times.

Will is one of her best friends, and a member of the party. A *key* member of the party, in fact. And when a party member is in need of assistance, it's the duty of the rest of the party to provide that assistance.

And, damn it, Will is her *friend*.

And now—so is this weird kid they've found in the woods.

"You don't talk a lot, do you," she says to the kid, as she sneaks down to the storm cellar.

Lev shakes his head.

"That's fine," she says, pulling out her old books. She'd have stolen her dad's records too, but they need to keep the kid hidden, and as much as she wants to introduce him to Elvis Presley, she knows the strains of "Hound Dog" would give them away real quick. "I've got some books here. And some comic books, too."

He squints down at them, and taps Will's X-Men comic.

"That's the X-Men," she says. "They're a team of superheroes who fight bad guys."

"Bad guys," Lev echoes. "Like. In the bad place."

“The bad place?” says Jane. “Where? Maybe after we find Will we can tell my dad—”

“No,” says Lev, shaking his head and grabbing her shoulders tight. “No.”

“Why not?” she asks.

“Because,” he starts, and pauses. He lets go of her shoulders and points two fingers at her head, his hand forming the shape of a gun.

A cold weight drops into her stomach.

“You’ve seen them do it?” she asks.

He nods, and curls up into a small ball. Jane’s stomach twists into knots—Lev’s just her age. He’s supposed to be playing games with his friends and going to school and he’s not supposed to know what it looks like, when someone gets shot.

She takes his hand. “I won’t tell anyone about you,” she says. “I promise.”

“Promise?” Lev asks.

Jane breathes out. “It’s when you tell a friend you’ll do something for them,” she says. “And it’s big. It’s really big. Once you promise something, you can’t break it. You *shouldn’t*.” Her dad might not be the best example, sure, he’s broken his promises before. But he always tries to keep them. Always.

She’ll do better than him. She’ll keep all her promises.

“Friend?” says Lev, just as Dustin comes down with Lucas in tow, the both of them smuggling snacks and books and toys.

“Hey, Jane,” says Dustin, “hey, Lev.”

“Hi, guys,” says Jane.

“What’s a friend?” says Lev.

Oh.

"It's, uh," Jane starts. She's never had to define this before—this feeling of camaraderie she has with Dustin and Lucas and Will, the sense of rightness when she's hanging out with them. When she's here with Lev.

She looks to Dustin.

"A friend is someone you share your toys and comic books with," says Dustin, ever reliable.

"Someone you can rely on when you need them," says Lucas. "Someone who'll do anything in their power to help you, and then some."

"They don't lie to you," Jane says. "They might try to protect you, if they're being stupid. But friends don't lie."

Lev nods. "You're friends?" he asks.

"Since diapers," says Lucas.

"Since I moved here," says Dustin.

"We're a party," says Jane. "Do you understand that? It means we're a group of friends who help each other out."

Lev looks up at her—*past* her and says, "Someone's gone." He gets to his feet and pushes past her, and points to one of Will's drawings—the four of them fighting against an army of undead, with Will's character shooting green fire from his staff. "Him," says Lev.

"You know about Will?" says Lucas.

Lev nods, and waves a hand at the drawing. "I saw him," he says.

Jane says, "*Where?*"

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So, long story short:

They have a lead on Will.

Also, Lev is apparently psychic, because when Lucas brings up the initial plan of letting Jane's dad know, half their stuff goes flying around before Jane can explain why it's a bad idea.

Nobody says anything about letting Jane's dad know, after that.

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"I can't keep him in my storm cellar forever," says Dustin, reasonably.

"I can't keep him in *my* house," says Lucas. "And if we're being honest here, I don't really want him in my house. He's—kind of creepy."

"I can't keep him in my dad's trailer forever either," says Jane. "So I guess we'll just have to pass him between us." She looks at Lev, who's fiddling now with the knobs on Jane's supercom. "You okay with that, Lev?"

Lev pauses. Then he shrugs and nods.

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Jane knows her dad's routines by now. He'll be out all day at the station, and with Will having disappeared he'll most likely stay there late, so she and Lev get on her bike and ride down to the trailer where she and her dad live.

It isn't much. It's kind of a really shitty place to raise a kid, Jane knows that, but she likes the trailer just fine even then. She likes her room, painted in shades of brown and green, the doorway with nicks in it to mark how tall she's gotten.

There used to be another doorway, with two sets of nicks, but—well. Sarah is gone now, and her mom too, and Jane and her dad are the only ones left.

And now Lev, too.

He steps inside the trailer and looks around, wide-eyed. It occurs to Jane that the storm cellar is cleaner than the trailer, and certainly has less beer cans lying around.

She sighs, and says, "I'll pick those up, don't worry." She waves a hand at her room, and says, "That's my room. Dad technically has a room, but he usually just passes out on the couch."

"It smells," says Lev, in wonder. He slowly turns around in a circle, as if taking in the whole scene, drinking in his surroundings, trying to commit it all to memory.

Jane watches him, and wonders if this is the first time he's ever even seen the inside of someone else's home. If so, the trailer's a very bad example.

"Come on, I'll show you my room," she says, tugging Lev into her room. He makes a little surprised noise when he sees it, the earthy colors and the pictures and all of Jane's books and toys, scattered all over the floor.

She shuts the door behind them. He jumps a little, whips around and breathes out a sigh of relief. Then he flops down onto her bed and lets out a long sigh.

"I'm much cleaner than my dad," Jane says, flopping down next to Lev.

"No," says Lev, poking her in the side. "Friends don't lie."

"I'm not lying!" says Jane, with a laugh. "You saw the living room. Dad's messier than I am."

"Still messy," Lev points out.

"How would you know?" Jane says. "Dustin's storm cellar isn't the cleanest."

Lev frowns, then sighs and nods. "Jane," he says.

"Yeah, Lev?"

"Your room," he says. "Not *bad*. I like it."

Jane smiles, and says, "Thanks."

Lev makes a humming noise in reply, and points at one of her movie posters. "What's *Star Wars*?" he asks.

"It's a really good movie," Jane answers, hopping off to pick up some of her toys. The *Millennium Falcon* is propped up against her closet door, and she picks it up and brings it over to Lev.

The kid's fascinated by her things, she can tell. He asks about her toys, about the characters in the poster, and she explains as best as she can. It's a little hard, because more than once he stops her to ask what she means by a word.

But once she's done, he tilts his head, points to himself, and says, "Jedi?"

"Definitely," says Jane.

Lev beams.

That, of course, is when she hears a car just outside. In her room, she hears a string of beeps, short and long. It's her dad.

"Shit!" she says. "My dad's back, you have to hide!"

Lev scoots off the bed, looks around.

Jane yanks her closet door open. "In here," she says, ushering Lev inside. "You have to hide in here. Don't make a sound or my dad will find you, okay?"

Lev nods, eyes wide.

"I'll be back," she tells him. "I promise."

She shuts the door.

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"You're home early," is Jane's greeting as Jim collapses onto the

chair. "I thought you'd be at the station longer."

"I'm going to be," says Jim, with a sigh, taking his hat off and fishing out a pack of camels. "I just—needed a break."

Needed to come back here. Needed to know you were safe.

Judging from how Jane hops into the chair across from him, he suspects she heard that loud and clear. Perceptive kid. Sometimes he marvels at how he managed not to fuck her up, even after Sarah. Sometimes he's scared he still might, somehow.

Jane props her chin up in her hand, watching him with those dark, earthy eyes. "You're not staying?" she asks.

"Not for very long, no," he says. "There's still a lot to do. And your friend's still missing."

Jane looks away, then, chewing on her lower lip. "Did you find anything?" she asks.

Jim sighs. "Not much, Janey," he says, thinking of Benny in the diner, the flies buzzing around his corpse, the gun in his hand. "But—did he say anything weird to you, before he disappeared?"

"Not really," says Jane. "He told Dustin how his dice roll turned out. That's all. Why?"

"Just a hunch," says Jim. "Hey, Jane—I, uh. Have some bad news."

Jane sits up straighter, eyes narrowing as he stands up, moving so he's crouching in front of her. "What?" she asks.

"Benny's dead," he says. "Apparently he shot himself."

"*Benny?*" says Jane, and shit, now she's upset, her shoulders shaking. "But—he *promised* to take me fishing."

"I know, kiddo," Jim says, tiredly. "I know."

"He *promised!*" she says again, her voice breaking, tears welling up in her eyes.

Jim lets out a breath, then takes her hand, wraps her tiny little hand in both of his. She breaks down sobbing, then, noisy and loud, shaking apart in front of his eyes, before she throws herself at him and weeps into his shoulder.

He holds her close, pats her hair as she cries. Benny had loved Jane, whenever she showed up at the diner. Jim can't imagine him giving in to his depression when he'd promised Jane a fishing trip.

He wishes he could tell her that. He wishes he could tell her, for sure, that Benny hadn't killed himself in his diner.

But Jane is only twelve, and whatever's going on with Will Byers' case, one thing's for sure: someone's willing to kill people to keep something hidden, and to go so far as to cover up their deaths as a suicide. What that thing is, he doesn't know, but he knows he has to find out. Until then, he can't risk his girl coming anywhere close to this mess.

Well. Closer than she already is.

Eventually her sobs taper off. She lets go of him, sniffles a little. "I didn't know," she says. "I didn't know it got bad again. I thought—"

"I know, Janey," Jim says. "Sometimes you can't do anything but clean up afterwards."

Jane's head bows a little.

"You'll tell me, right?" Jim says, quiet. "If anything happens. You know I'm here for you, all right, kiddo?"

Jane looks up. After a heartbeat, she nods. "I know," she says.

Then the phone rings. Jim sighs, and stands up. "Yeah, that's probably me," he says. "Was hoping to cook dinner tonight."

"I can make dinner," says Jane. "You're leaving now?"

"Seems like," says Jim. "Hey, Jane—don't go anywhere, all right? Until we find Will."

“Okay,” says Jane, as Jim picks the phone up.

Something crashes in Jane’s room, just then. She whips around, fast as the wind, and says, “Oh, shit—”

“Jane—” Jim starts.

“It’s fine, Dad!” Jane says, waving a hand towards her room. “I just did some rearranging. I think maybe my *Falcon* crashed.”

“Knew that ship was going to be trouble,” Jim grumbles, turning back to the phone. Out of the corner of his eye, he spots Jane relaxing visibly. Something’s up here, and he needs to find out what, but—

“Chief? Hey, Chief, you there?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m here,” says Jim. “Just some of Jane’s stuff. I’ll be down in a sec.” He turns to Jane and says, “You be careful, all right?”

“I’m *always* careful,” Jane huffs, with a hint of that teenage contrariness he’s dreading having to deal with. “Just—go.”

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Her dad goes.

Jane rushes back to her room, throws open the closet door to find Lev, curled up into a ball, eyes shining with unshed tears. He’s so small, like this.

She gets down on her knees.

“You okay?” she asks. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were scared of the dark.” Sarah had been, too.

“I’m okay,” says Lev, who is very obviously not okay even when he summons a (brittle, completely fake) smile for her. “See? Promise.”

Jane scoots closer. “My dad’s gone,” she says, quiet. “He went back to work. If you want I can take you back to Dustin’s.”

Lev shakes his head. "I like it," he tells her. "Your room. It's good."

She nods. "Okay," she says. "I can make us some dinner. What kind of food do you want?"

Lev pauses. Then, decisively, he says, "Eggos."

Jane grins, at the prospect of eating her favorite food with someone who appreciates it as much as she does. "Eggos it is," she says.